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TESTIMONY OF ARYATI
AT A HUMAN RIGHTS SUB-COMMITTEE BRIEFING
THE UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

May 7, 1999

Honorable Members of Congress,

I come here to speak on behalf of Indonesians who are deeply concerned with the deteriorating conditions in East Timor. The preamble of the Indonesian constitution states that "independence is the right of all nations." Yet the Indonesian government has denied the right of self-determination to the East Timorese since invading the country in 1975. As an Indonesian citizen, I feel responsible to the East Timorese people and ashamed of the unspeakable atrocities the Indonesian military has committed.

Women in East Timor
I first visited East Timor last August. Once Suharto had resigned in May, the political climate in East Timor had greatly improved. The repression had partially lessened because of the confusion in Jakarta. The East Timorese were emboldened to speak out, hold forums, and demonstrate in the streets. The military was continuing to commit human rights abuses but the East Timorese were able to seize many liberties. It was the freest time there since 1975.

What impressed me most was the determination of the East Timorese to live normal lives, to send their children to school, to attend Sunday church in nice clothes, to tend their gardens. After living so long under one of this century's worst military occupations, they were using the brief, partial reprieve after Suharto's fall to fulfill their ideals of the good life.

I went to East Timor to assist a local women's organization establish a weavers cooperative. I met with women weavers in Maubara village in the district of Liquiça. As they led me around their village, in and out of their bamboo homes, I learned that East Timorese do not consider a home complete if it does not have a loom. The women's homes were in ill-repair, their diets were poor, their incomes were meager, yet invariably they reserved money to buy the thread to weave cloth. This homemade cloth was neither intended for everyday use nor for sale. They weaved to make things of beauty. The women generously gave me cloths and flatly refused to accept any money in return.

The next I heard about the women weavers, late last year, was that they had fled their homes and looms. They had taken refuge in the Catholic church building in the town of Liquiça because of attacks and threats from the militias who had been armed and financed by the Indonesian military. Some of the women weavers were no doubt among the dead and wounded of the Liquiça church massacre on April 6, 1999. The staff of a legal aid organization, which investigated the massacre at great risk to

themselves, discovered that at least 57 people had been hacked to death by the militia members wielding knives and axes.

As has been reported by Fokupers, an East Timorese women's organization, the military-supported militias are especially targeting women and children. As the men in the villages fled from the militias, pregnant women, those who had recently given birth, or those taking care of small children have taken refuge in churches or large private homes. Many of the dead and wounded in the massacres at the Liquiça church and at Manuel Carrascalao's home in Dili were women and children.

Women have long been brutalized by the Indonesian military as I realized during my second visit to East Timor in December. I accompanied the United Nations Special Rapporteur for Violence Against Women, Raddhika Coomaraswamy. At that time, I had the chance to meet with about twenty women who were the victims of military violence. Some of them came with their children who were born as a result of rapes committed by the Indonesian soldiers. They were willing to come from the far corners of the island because they were desperate to have their grievances heard and redressed. I heard about one atrocity after another. Their unanimous plea was: "please, tell the Indonesian military to get out of East Timor, or else well never be able to live in peace."

The Military's Current Terror Campaign

From the events of this year, it is clear that the Indonesian military does not want to leave East Timor. When President Habibie announced in January that the East Timorese would be able to vote on whether they wished to remain as part of Indonesia or not, the military immediately began to intensify its war on the East Timorese.

While the Foreign Ministry has been negotiating at the United Nations since January about how the vote will be held, the military in East Timor has been conducting an operation to kill off prominent advocates of independence and terrorize the population into voting for the continuation of Indonesias occupation. The Indonesian military is determined to prevent a free and fair vote since it knows that the vast majority of East Timorese will choose independence.

The military organized, financed, armed, and encouraged East Timorese criminals and thugs into militias and then set them loose like attack dogs upon the society. The military has destroyed the relative peace that prevailed when I was there last year and has plunged East Timor into barbarism. By now, it is difficult to determine how many people the military has killed so far this year. The human rights organization, YAYASAN HAK, which usually conducts fact-finding investigations, has been unable to keep up with all the killings. Moreover, the staff members of HAK themselves have been terrorized and its director, Aniceto Guterres Lopes, driven into hiding.

The military has forcibly driven thousands of villagers into open-air prisons where they are forced to sing the Indonesian national anthem and pledge allegiance to the Indonesian flag. The Sydney Morning Herald has

called the enclosure in the town of Liquiça a "concentration camp". Needless to say, the August vote will not be free and fair if the military is allowed to continue herding people into camps and committing atrocities.

The US Response

The United States government, at this critical hour, has the chance to ensure that the August vote is free and fair. The Clinton administration must abandon its customary practice of issuing gentle rebukes to the Indonesian military and take decisive, concrete action. Right now, the United States is doing nothing but allowing the United Nations to proceed with the preparations for the August vote.

That is not enough. The vote will not be free and fair unless the Indonesian military is forced to end its terror campaign and that is something the United Nations can not do. The US government, however, does have the power to curb the Indonesian military. It could, at the very least, immediately cut off all arms sales to Indonesia a simple act that, astonishingly enough, the Clinton administration has refused to do. It could also persuade Britain to cut off its arms sales. Just last month, Britain shipped fighter aircraft to the Indonesian military.

The Clinton administration must not be allowed to claim that it does not want to disturb or offend the Indonesian military prior to the delicate June national elections in Indonesia. As an Indonesian citizen, I can assure you that the military is the greatest danger to the development of democracy in Indonesia. It routinely commits massacres in the twenty-six provinces that are, unlike East Timor, legally part of the country. The military only creates unrest and disorder wherever it goes. It is one state institution that is above the law and completely unaccountable.

The Habibie regime, which claims to be a reformist government, has stopped short of reforming the military. It has done little to demand that the military take responsibility for the past and present abuses of human rights it has committed. Anytime a military atrocity or crime is exposed, the generals always speak of "oknum", a rogue officer disobeying orders. By now, with so many scandals exposed, the military will either have to admit that it is entirely staffed with undisciplined rogue officers or that it violates human rights as a matter of course.

If the Clinton administration continues to coddle of the military, it will only feel emboldened to commit more atrocities. Only days after the Commander of the Seventh Fleet had a friendly chat in mid-April with Gen. Wiranto, the Commander in Chief of the Indonesian military, Wirantos men in East Timor encouraged their East Timorese collaborators to go on a rampage and kill dozens of innocent civilians. Wiranto is clearly conniving in the violence in East Timor that has extended over a five month period.

We do not want the US to bomb Indonesia to stop atrocities in East Timor. After all, such a bombing could kill me and many other Indonesians who are struggling against our government's occupation of East Timor. We are only asking that the US stop helping the Indonesian military.

It is obscene for the Clinton administration to be following a policy of constructive engagement with the Indonesian military, a lawless institution led by men who should be treated as war criminals, while talking so righteously about countering Serbian atrocities in Kosovo. If the US is willing to spend billions to stop atrocities on the Kosovo Albanians, it should be willing to save itself money by denying all aid to the Indonesian military.

Again, I want to assure you that if the US government acts to end the military's illegal occupation of East Timor, it will be helping, not harming, the development of democracy inside Indonesia itself. The occupation of East Timor has been the military's major project for the past 23 years. If that project can be ended, Indonesians will be closer to ending the military's control over the Indonesian state and society. As Marzuki Darusman, Head of the National Commission on Human Rights has said, "The military is fighting for political survival in this country. If East Timor was let go, it would open up a chain reaction. Then you could easily shunt the military aside from politics. It's countdown time for them."

Thank you.